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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000546

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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [LE](#) [SY](#)  
SUBJECT: MGLE01: AMAL POLITICAL MOVEMENT ANNOUNCES  
DIALOGUE FOR MARCH 2-9 IN BEIRUT

Classified By: Jeffrey Feltman, Ambassador. Reasons Section 1.4 (b).

¶1. (C) Summary and introduction: On February 17, Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri renewed his call for a dialogue among members of the Parliament's leadership. Berri emerged from addressing his Hizballah-allied parliamentary partners to call for a gathering of political leaders on March 2-9 to take place at the parliament building. Berri's political spokesman Ali Hamdan is convinced that all political blocs will be represented at the meetings. However, immediately after Berri made his call for dialogue, Walid Jumblatt announced he would not take part in the dialogue with Hizballah, and Samir Ja'ja' said that his ministers would not participate in cabinet meetings that took place at the presidential Baabda palace. In the past few days, however, an increasing number of political leaders have decided to attend, and Ja'ja' and Jumblatt are reconsidering. End summary and introduction.

¶2. (C) Ali Hamdan arrived at a February 18 meeting with poloff late, and wearing a worried expression. He immediately said the level of political rhetoric in Lebanon was "a nightmare." Hamdan offered that the language being used by "some people -- meaning Walid Jumblatt -- would not lead to normal relations with Syria, not to mention the exceptional relations foreseen in the 1989 Taif accords. He explained that Nabih Berri is worried about the future of the country, and so insisted that now more than ever, the party leaders had to come together to discuss their differences. Hamdan was even more worried by statements from Lebanese Forces leader Samir Ja'ja'. Paraphrasing the Christian leader's comments, he said that labeling Syria as an enemy at Lebanon's back was likely to incite unrest.

¶3. (C) When asked if all the parliamentary leaders would attend the formal meetings, Hamdan said, "no one has refused so far." He said Berri has assurances from Saad Hariri that he would attend as head of his bloc. PM Siniora would be invited as Prime Minister. Likewise, Aoun would attend the meeting. Without mentioning names, Hamdan said that most bloc leaders had already contacted the Speaker expressing their willingness to convene. However, Hamdan added that all these agreements were made before February 14, and before the announcement of the March 14 deadline for Lahoud's departure from office. Hamdan said he was confident that political leaders would keep their commitment to Berri to attend the meeting; he quickly added that responses to formal invitations would be coming in during the weekend of February 18-19.

¶4. (C) Hamdan said Berri plans to begin the dialogue with common, broadly accepted themes: the investigation into Hariri's murder, UNSCR 1559, and normalizing relations with

Syria. But Hamdan was uncertain how Berri would deal with the issue of UNSCR 1559 and its importance for Hizballah, Amal's chief partner. He also did not know how the dialogue would approach the issue of the removal of President Lahoud, named by the March 14 Coalition as the chief objective of their movement. He avoided any suggestion that the dialogue might seek a means to legally and peacefully remove President Lahoud from office. Hamdan did, however, hope that the meetings might head off a proposed march on Baabda by March 14 supporters. He said that the specter of the February 5 demonstrations that ended in violence and destruction of property were still fresh in the minds of people. He added that taking a million people to Baabda would be much more difficult to control and could have tragic results.

COMMENT

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15. (C) Berri's call for dialogue is not new. But now it represents a chance to avoid a potentially violent campaign of civil disobedience to depose president Lahoud. The success of Berri's initiative depends on the good will of the Lebanese political leadership. Saad Hariri must appear if the meeting is to be credible. Aoun must be willing to discuss the operations of government without making his presidential candidacy an obstacle to progress on other issues. Most importantly, Hizballah, which should also be present at the meeting, will have to address the issue of UNSCR 1559 in a way that does not alienate the other parties.

The meeting will be a chance to see to what degree Aoun is willing to make common cause with Hizballah after their much-publicized communique. Meanwhile, Walid Jumblatt seems to be holding to his position that is pointless to have a national dialogue that does not address the issue of the

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Presidency. End comment.  
FELTMAN